CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 16 August 2001, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Carlos Amat Forés (Cuba)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 882nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, I have been informed that Ambassador Petko Draganov of Bulgaria will soon be leaving Geneva due to the fact that his Government has assigned him other important duties in his country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ambassador Draganov has been with us since 6 August 1998. During his stay here he defended the position of his Government with authority and diplomatic talent, and entered into close links with all of us in the Conference. His contribution to our collective efforts to achieve consensus showed in all its splendour when he chaired the final part of the session of the Conference for the year 2000. His diplomatic talent was also recognized this year when the Conference appointed him special coordinator on the expansion of the Conference. I am sure that you all share my wishes of success for Ambassador Draganov in his future duties, and we are certain that he will also continue to contribute to the best development of our activities. We would like to wish Ambassador Draganov well and great success in his new duties.

Ambassador Draganov has the floor.

Mr. DRAGANOV (Bulgaria): Thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words.

Mr. President, this happens to be my first intervention under your presidency, and, although you may be chairing your last plenary meeting, please allow me formally to convey my warmest congratulations and personal satisfaction on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Rest assured of my delegation's continued support and high appreciation.

Let me also congratulate your predecessor, Ambassador Reyes of Colombia, and express my delegation's gratitude for the energy applied and the excellent work done under his presidency. The appointment of special coordinators on the effective functioning, the agenda and the expansion of the Conference on Disarmament is a welcome and much-needed positive signal emanating from our negotiating body. For reasons beyond my control, this is, again, the first time I have taken the floor in plenary since that appointment, and I would like to stress my wholehearted gratitude for the trust with which I was honoured as special coordinator on the expansion of the Conference.

Alas, Mr. President, this is also my last statement to the Conference on Disarmament, as I am being recalled by my Government to serve in another capacity. The result of my disarmament activities must have been so impressive that it was decided to put an end to them urgently and give me an assignment which, among other things, may actually include overseeing some measure of rearmament activity.

Looking back, I recall my first appearance in this solemn hall and my first statement here. It was on the very day that the Conference was able to adopt, after prolonged negotiation, the

(Mr. Draganov, Bulgaria)

decision to establish an Ad Hoc Committee on FMCT. I remember it well. Delegations expressed great satisfaction. Colleagues came up to me and congratulated me for bringing good luck to the Conference.

I wonder. Probably because I was still new to this Conference, I did not quite grasp why this decision was being given so much importance that day. I figured the really important time would be when the Conference got down to real negotiations on an agreement per se. But, like I said, it was back then, and I was still a green hand. I know better now.

For the last three years my delegation has consistently endeavoured to make a substantive contribution to our work. My main goal throughout this time has been to create, by means of effective networking, a better understanding of the problems that we face and a more common vision of ways to achieve progress. I had the honour to chair the "like-minded group" of countries on anti-personnel landmines. I was privileged to preside over the Conference on Disarmament and to present its 2000 annual report to the United Nations General Assembly. I am consulting on the expansion of the Conference. But three years seem so short now. And I still find myself involved in pre-negotiating intensive consultations on possible agreements on eventual substance. It sounds frustrating and, often enough, it is frustrating.

Yet, I do not feel my time here has been wasted. On the contrary, I feel immensely enriched by the experience. I have discovered first-hand just how much hard work international arms control, peace and security require. I have made many friends and I have lots of unfinished business left. So, I will be back.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all colleagues for the advice, the cooperation and the goodwill that I have enjoyed during my tour of duty. Let me say a special word of acknowledgement for the custodian of our proceedings, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and for his deputy, Mr. Enrique Román-Morey. I would like to commend all the members of the Secretariat for their energy and competence, and - last, but not least - the interpreters, for their skill and tolerance.

There we go. I am now officially into my third page, so my good friend and colleague Frank Majoor would not hold it against me if I conclude here.

Thank you, Mr. President, and good luck to you all.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank you, Ambassador, for your kind words. Having listened to you I think that if this Conference does not make progress we will feel compelled to ask your Government to reappoint you here to see whether you can bring good luck to us again. In any event, I wish you the best of luck in your next duties.

According to the secretariat, there are no speakers on my list for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage?

(The President)

That does not seem to be the case, and hence I would like, with your leave, to make a final statement upon the conclusion of Cuba's presidency of the Conference.

Dear ambassadors, distinguished delegates, we are gathered here today at the last plenary meeting corresponding to our period in the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, which is about to end.

We have tried to fulfil with dedication the high responsibility which was entrusted to us. We have held weeks of intensive consultations, which have involved the great majority of members of the Conference. Time constraints as well as the unavailability of some delegations prevented direct consultations with all of them.

Today we are bringing here no spectacular announcement. Our presidency will not be marked by what might have been named the "Amat proposal", aimed at resolving the existing difficulties in adopting a programme of work for the Conference.

Perhaps the only criticism that I could make to my dear friend, Ambassador Camilo Reyes, is that, at the moment we succeeded him in the presidency, he forgot to give us the magic wand that makes possible a solution to all the problems. I express, in advance, my apologies to my successor and friend, Ambassador Roberto Betancourt from Ecuador, because, even though we would like to give him a magic wand, I myself do not have one either.

Our consultations confirmed that the Amorim proposal continues to enjoy wide support as the basis for reaching a consensus on the programme of work of the Conference and it sums up in itself most of the efforts that the members of the Conference and its successive presidents have made over the years. As a working basis, we adopt the principle of keeping the Amorim proposal intact, unless real possibilities of moving forward by introducing some changes emerge.

Although some may not share this approach, we have the conviction that it was the most convenient way of proceeding in the present situation. In our view, to begin introducing modifications to the Amorim proposal without real prospects of success would be a step backward instead of forward.

During our mandate, we have tried to work with the greatest transparency, giving detailed information at each plenary meeting and in the presidential consultations about the course of our work. At the same time, we can say today that, with the discretion that sometimes this kind of initiative requires, at a certain moment during our presidency, we tried to advance some possible compromise formulas with some of the major players.

Unfortunately, after those actions it was absolutely clear to us that, at least for the time being, there are not the minimum conditions for the Conference to agree on a programme of work or to move forward on substantive issues.

We have not come here to point out those who are responsible for the lack of substantive advances in the Conference. That is not my role as President and we do not believe it would

(The President)

contribute to achieving solutions. But it does not mean that truths should be hidden. It is a secret for no one that certain countries have a particularly significant leading role in the present situation of lack of agreement on a programme of work for the Conference. We all know that there are key decisions that have to be made outside the Conference in order to allow a real advance in it. Not only do such decisions continue not to materialize, but also it is an undeniable reality that a new international scenario, which is at the least worrisome, is being formed and could possibly have very negative implications for the work of the Conference in particular and for multilateralism in general. In fact, our contacts made it evident that a great number of delegations tend to think that the prospects for the immediate future of the Conference are not encouraging.

On the one hand, the great majority wish to preserve the Conference as the unique multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament will make it very difficult, at least in the short term, for the Conference to be wound up. Nevertheless, if the periods without real advances in substantive work were to continue, this body's credibility would be seriously affected. That would serve the interests only of those who prefer to take action outside the Conference, disregarding the interests and the positions of the rest of the international community.

Distinguished ambassadors and delegates, we have perceived great willingness on the part of delegations to contribute to the work of the three special coordinators appointed during the presidency of Ambassador Camilo Reyes. Such appointments were, without any doubt, an important practical step forward whose effects should be neither overestimated, nor belittled. While we unconditionally support the coordinators' work, we are also convinced that all possible efforts should continue to be made in order to try to advance on substantive issues which are ultimately the main raison d'être of this body.

Turning the work on procedural issues into a kind of permanent substitute for the Conference's substantive work should be avoided by all means. The Conference's procedures and methods of work can and should be improved, but they cannot be held responsible for the lack of results in our work. Although its constant repetition can make it an empty phrase, it is an unquestionable truth that the key lies in the political will and flexibility of all members of the Conference. We would not be able to advance much without that.

This week we had the opportunity to carry out an interesting and useful exchange with the three special coordinators regarding the course of their work. I would like to congratulate them for the professionalism and dedication with which they are fulfilling their responsibilities. I also want to use this occasion to encourage all interested delegations that have not yet done so to contribute with their opinions in reply to the questionnaires prepared by the coordinators.

Taking into account the short time available, it will be difficult for the special coordinators to conclude their work at this session. During our extensive consultations, we have noted a wide convergence of opinions with regard to the appropriateness of ensuring the continuity of the coordinators' work. To this end, I would suggest that the next President, when

(The President)

preparing the Conference's draft annual report, should consider the possibility of reflecting in it this convergence of opinions and possibly including a recommendation for giving continuity to the work of the coordinators next year.

In order to have the most objective possible assessment of the course of the coordinators' work, likewise the possibility of annexing the interim reports on their work to the Conference's annual report could be considered. The Conference on Disarmament is a body of vital importance and it should therefore be preserved in the present situation and should be ready to act as soon as the necessary conditions arise. This is not the time to let pessimism prevail, and we must continue to contribute, with our common efforts, to making this forum work in accordance with its very high responsibilities.

Distinguished colleagues, having said the above, allow me to use this opportunity now to say a few words as the representative of Cuba.

It is our position that the programme of work of the Conference should reflect the present challenges and the interests and priorities of the international community, and not those of only a few countries. It is worrisome that the Conference cannot move forward in its substantive work, including on such key issues as nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, due to the inflexible positions of some countries. There are still thousands of nuclear weapons in the world which threaten the very survival of humanity and we cannot stand idly by and let such dangers be passed on to future generations. The top priority of nuclear disarmament cannot be unknown, and no one can presume that this is an issue to be resolved in the back of the international community. Pretexts cannot continue to be made for impeding the elimination of the possibility of a nuclear war and the threats deriving from the very existence of nuclear weapons.

Various recent examples, such as the cases of the Kyoto Protocol, the preservation of the ABM Treaty, the Programme of Action of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small and Light Weapons, and the negotiations of the Verification Protocol to the Convention on Biological Weapons, among others, show that unless we do something in time, we will run the risk of allowing unilateralism based on power and narrow national interests to prevail in the world. For many countries, including my own, multilateralism has key importance and it should be preserved by any means. We cannot remain indifferent to the real possibility that some powerful countries even feel comfortable making decisions on disarmament which affect us all, and do so outside the multilateral forums, particularly the Conference on Disarmament. Multilateralism is a fundamental responsibility that all States have. Moreover, it is a task that cannot be accomplished without the valuable support of other important players, such as non-governmental organizations and the media. International public opinion should be aware of the risks that we are all running and of the need to act in order to avoid them.

Now I reassume my functions as President and I would like to conclude by expressing my gratitude once again for the countless expressions of support that we have received from delegations during our mandate. I could also not fail to pay a special tribute to all the members of the secretariat of the Conference, including officials, interpreters, translators and other support

(The President)

staff, for the excellent assistance given for our work. We are particularly grateful to His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the Conference, with whom we had the opportunity to hold one of the most interesting meetings during our presidency; to His Excellency Mr. Enrique Román-Morey, Deputy Secretary-General, for his permanent concern and advice; and also to Ms. Jenifer Mackby, Mr. Jerzy Zaleski and Mrs. Charlotte Laut Hernández, and others, whose dedication and professionalism very much facilitated our work.

I wish the greatest success to the distinguished Ambassador of Ecuador, Mr. Roberto Betancourt, who will assume the presidency of the Conference from 20 August to 31 December 2001. It is hardly necessary to assure him that he can always count on the support and cooperation of our delegation.

Thank you all very much.

Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not appear to be the case

Now, with regard to the timetable of meetings for next week, I would like to recall the decision on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament adopted at the 575th plenary meeting of the Conference on 21 August 1990 (document CD/1036) and, in particular, its paragraph 4, pursuant to which the Conference shall hold two plenary meetings for, inter alia, two middle weeks (weeks 21 and 22) of the third part of the annual session. This year, the twenty-first week of the session begins next Monday, 20 August, and the twenty-second week begins on Monday, 27 August.

At this stage, there are no speakers for next week. However, the special coordinator on improved and effective functioning of the Conference, Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam of Sri Lanka, has expressed his intention to hold the second informal open-ended consultations on Tuesday, 21 August 2001, at 11.30 a.m., in the Council Chamber.

Furthermore, the special coordinator on the review of the agenda of the Conference, Ambassador Seibert of Germany, intends to convene informal open-ended consultations on this subject immediately following the plenary meeting on Thursday, 23 August 2001.

Accordingly, the timetable for next week is as follows: on Tuesday, 21 August 2001, at 11.30 a.m., informal open-ended consultations on improved and effective functioning of the Conference; and on Thursday, 23 August 2001, at 10.00 a.m., the next plenary meeting of the Conference, followed by informal open-ended consultations on review of the agenda of the Conference. All these meetings will be held in the Council Chamber.

Again, I would like to thank you all for your cooperation. As of next Monday I hand over the presidency of the Conference to the Ambassador of Ecuador.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.